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AUTHOR Silva, Clare M.
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ABSTRACT

The present study analyzes the "ing" forms that follow deictic verbs of movement, including "go," "come," "take," "bring," and "carry." Many examples are given to support the theory that the "ing" forms are not verbs or nouns, but rahter adverbials and that these adverbials are members of a class that refers to activities characterized by certain general semantic properties: (1) the activity is recreational; (2) it is physical; (3) it is relatively unstructured as far as game-like rules are concerned; (4) it involves continued motion from one undetermined location to another; and, for one subset of forms, (5) the activity involves seeking out and attempting to take or acquire some physical object(s). (PP)

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Adverbial -ing

Clare M. Silva

In a recent squib Berman 1973:403 asks 'what sorts of -ing nouns' occur in sentences like

(1) I'm going fishing.

Berman attributes to Ross 1972:fn. 16 the notion that the acceptability of (1) depends upon the analysis of the -ing form as a noun (rather than a verb). I submit that (a) what appear to be -ing nouns are not verbs or nouns, but rather adverbials, and (b) these adverbials are members of a class that may be defined by general semantic characteristics.[1]

1. Syntactic properties.

The verbs which support these -ing constructions are deictic verbs of movement, including go, come, take, bring, and carry.

(2) a. Jane said she would {come / go} fishing with us.

b. Can we {take / bring} Harry camping next week?

c. He always carries that same knife hunting with him.

The do so test (Lakoff and Ross 1966) shows the -ing form to be within the verb phrase:

(3) a. John went fishing and I did so{too / *hunting}.

b. He took a friend skiing and I did so {too / *skating}.

The fact that these -ing forms have Ø pro-forms, illustrated in (4), would appear to be evidence for their being verbs (and for the movement verbs' being auxiliaries); compare the effects of VP Deletion in (5).

(4) a. I went fishing and John went too.
b. Mary's gone shopping and Janet has gone too.

(5) a. I may fish and John may too.
b. Mary's gone and Janet has too.

However, the complements that occur with the -ing forms are like those of nouns rather than verbs. In particular, the -ing forms occur with

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prepositional objects but not with plain objects.[2] Compare (6) with (7).

(6) a. Jake said he'd be sailing {catamarans / in a catamaran} tonight.
b. Sue is hunting {bear / for bears}.

(7) a. Jake said he'd go sailing {*catamarans / in a catamaran} tonight.
b. Sue's gone hunting {*bear / for bears}.

Despite this, and despite the fact that the -ing form appears in object position, it fails to function as a noun insofar as it cannot be (a) questioned by what or which, (b) pronominalized by it, that, or one, or (c) qualified by a nominal modifier:

(8) a. *{What / Which} (fishing) are you going tomorrow?
b. *We want to go hunting, but John doesn't want to go {it / that / one}.
c. *We're going {our fishing / some fishing / good fishing / fishing that lasts all day}.

In the absence of evidence for the -ing form as a verb or noun, the only function that it can fulfill within the verb phrase is that of directional adverbial. Positive evidence for an adverbial function is provided by the forms being used (a) in response to the question where, and (b) in adverbial phrases headed by from.[3]

(9) a. Where are you {going? / taking him?} {Downtown / Through the tunnel / Fishing}.
b. She has just come home from {the university / swimming}.

A peculiarity of the construction is that it may not appear with a very precise specification of place.

(10) a. He went fishing {up north / ?under the willow by the pier / *at the marked spot}.
b. She went shopping {downtown / ?at the Petite Boutique / *at the wig counter}.

2. Semantic properties.

The class of forms that function as adverbial -ing includes the following:[4]

(11) a.

dancing	boating	bowling
skiing	rowing	sight-seeing
skating	canoeing	caroling
hiking	sailing	Halloweening
jogging	caving	visiting
cycling	camping	calling [= visiting]
riding	swimming	

b.

fishing
hunting
nutting
clamming
mushrooming
berrying
shopping

Other forms may be constructed by compounding some of the above:

(12)

water-skiing	duck hunting
trout-fishing	ice-skating
deep sea fishing	motorcycling

All of the forms of (11) refer to activities which are characterized by the following properties:

(13) a. the activity is recreational;
b. the activity is physical;
c. the activity is relatively unstructured as far as game-like rules are concerned;[5]
d. in carrying out the activity, there is continued motion from one undetermined location to another (cf. (10) above).

The forms of (11b) are further characterized by property (14):

(14) the activity involves seeking out and attempting to take or acquire some physical object(s).

To verify (13), we note that a nonrecreational activity will not do--

(15) *He's going { working / teaching / farming / studying } .

nor will a nonphysical activity--

(16) *She went { puzzle-solving / day-dreaming / meditating }

nor will physical, recreational activities that are structured in a game-like manner--

(17) *Let's go { racing / polo-playing }.

or involve movement constrained to occur within a relatively small radius--

(18) *They've gone { fungo-catching / boxing / piano-playing / wrestling }.

Berman 403 wonders what the explanation is for the grammaticality of wenching and the ungrammaticality of screwing in a pair of sentences noted by Andy Rogers:

(19) a. He's going wenching.
b. *He's going screwing.

These grammaticality judgments are predictable, however. Both wenching and screwing can be characterized by (13a-c), since they are activities which it is our custom to view as recreational, physical, and relatively unstructured with respect to game-like rules. However, only wenching satisfies (13d), since wenching requires movement from one undetermined location to another in order to carry out the activity--i.e. from a point of departure (home, office, factory, library, etc.) to another place or places (bar, brothel, hotel, etc.)--while screwing does not necessarily involve movement from one location to another, but may be carried on within a relatively small radius. Wenching furthermore satisfies property (14) for subset (b) of (11), since wenching involves seeking out and attempting to take or acquire a wench, i.e. a female sex object.

Footnotes

1. I am grateful to Arnold M. Zwicky and Michael L. Geis for discussion and examples.

2. The one exception I find to this is with the form visiting, which will give

(i) I'm going to go visiting { sick friends / relatives / old classmates }.

3. The adverbial -ing form cannot be pronominalized by there, as would be the case if it were a locative adverbial:

(i) I went { downtown / *through the tunnel / *fishing } and Bill went there too.

4. Note that some of these items are constrained to occur with -ing, whether in a progressive or in the adverbial -ing construction:

(i) a. I { was / went } mushrooming this morning.

b. *I mushroomed this morning.

(ii) a. We { were / had gone } sightseeing for a while.

b. *We sightsaw for a while.

5. Bowling would appear to be an irregularity here, since it is structured for play and scoring.

References

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